



UNITED STATES SENATE
**REPUBLICAN
POLICY COMMITTEE**

Larry E. Craig, Chairman
Jade West, Staff Director

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Ballistic Missile Threat Persists

**What the National Intelligence Estimate
Really Says . . . and Means.**

If you read only the *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*, you might think the Intelligence Community has completely revised its assessment of the ballistic missile threat to the United States. Headlines in those newspapers earlier this year read: “U.S. Alters Estimate of Threats: Non-Missile Attacks Likelier, CIA Says,” and “Worst Attacks Won’t Come By Missiles” [*Washington Post*, 1/11/02; *Los Angeles Times*, 1/12/02]. But that’s only part of the story, and not even the most important part.

A hearing before the Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on International Affairs on Monday of this week helped set the issue straight: “The probability that a missile with a weapon of mass destruction will be used against U.S. forces or interests is higher today than during most of the Cold War and it will continue to grow as the capabilities of potential adversaries mature,” testified the CIA’s national intelligence officer for strategic and nuclear affairs, Robert D. Walpole.

Walpole was sharing with the committee unclassified portions of The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), a report produced by the National Intelligence Council (NIC), a body representing the consensus views from the CIA and 12 other intelligence agencies regarding the ballistic missile threat to the United States. That report also reveals that: “More nations have ballistic missiles, and they have already been used against U.S. and allied forces during the Gulf war. Although the missiles used in the Gulf war did not have WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) warheads, Iraq had weaponized ballistic missile warheads with BW (Biological Weapons) and CW (Chemical Weapons) agents and they were available for use” [“Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat Through 2015,” National Intelligence Council, January 2002, p. 8].

In fact, the report (in 18 out of the 19 pages) highlights the missile threat: “The ballistic missile remains a central element in the military arsenals of nations around the globe and almost certainly will retain this status over the next 15 years” [NIE, p. 6]. Specifically, most of the Intelligence agencies project that “during the next 15 years the United States most likely will face ICBM threats from North Korea and Iran, and possibly Iraq . . . in addition to the strategic forces of Russia and China” [p. 7].

The NIE identifies the trend as moving toward “a maturation process among existing ballistic missile programs rather than toward a large increase in the number of countries possessing ballistic missiles.” And while the report asserts that the number of countries possessing these systems will not increase, it also warns that “emerging ballistic missile states continue to increase the range, reliability, and accuracy of the missile systems in their inventories — posing ever greater risks to U.S. forces, interests, and allies throughout the world” [p.7].

Terrorist Attack Using Nonmissile Means

A small portion of the NIE does state that a terrorist attack using nonmissile means is more likely than a missile attack against U.S. interests:

“Some of the states armed with missiles have exhibited a willingness to use chemical weapons with other delivery means. In addition, some nonstate entities are seeking chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) materials and would be willing to use them without missiles. In fact, U.S. territory is more likely to be attacked with these materials from nonmissile delivery means — most likely from terrorists — than by missiles primarily because nonmissile delivery means are less costly, easier to acquire, and are reliable and accurate. They also can be used without attribution” [p. 9].

More important, however, are the next two sentences of the report, which state:

“Nevertheless, the missile threat will continue to grow, in part because missiles have become important regional weapons in the arsenals of numerous countries. Moreover, missiles provide a level of prestige, coercive diplomacy, and deterrence that nonmissile means do not” [p. 9].

Rogue Nations’ Missiles and Deterrence

This point – that missiles provide a level of deterrence – is critical to understanding how the circumstance of ballistic missiles in the hands of rogue nations impacts U.S. deterrence and defense. By fielding ballistic missiles that can target American soldiers or citizens, rogue countries could curtail U.S. freedom of action in crises; they could impact decisions on whether, when, and how the United States should intervene in a particular theater, even if our interests or those of our allies are at stake.

In fact, it appears the Iraqis believed their weapons of mass destruction deterred the United States military from advancing to Baghdad during the Gulf War. Charles Duelfer, an American who was U.S. deputy executive chairman of the U.N. Special Commission on Iraq, related to the Senate Armed Services Committee his conversation with top Iraqi officials in the aftermath of the Gulf War:

“I had asked about the decision by the Iraqi leadership not to employ WMD in the 1991 Gulf War. . . . My interlocutors went on to describe how they had loaded BW

and CW agent into various missile warheads and bombs before hostilities began in 1991. Moreover they dispersed these weapons and pre-delegated the authority to use them if the United States moved on Baghdad. The Iraqis stated that these actions apparently deterred the United States from going to Baghdad.

“Whether the Iraqi leadership believes this was the only reason the United States did not go to Baghdad in 1991 is unknown. However, clearly they are convinced that the possession of WMD contributed to keeping the Americans away and thus was vital to their survival.” [Testimony before the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, 2/27/02]

Ballistic Missile Threats from Rogue Countries: More Accurate, More Sophisticated, More Lethal

Six months to the day after the September 11 attacks, President Bush highlighted the nexus between weapons of mass destruction and state-sponsored terrorism:

“Here is what we already know: some states that sponsor terror are seeking or already possess weapons of mass destruction; terrorist groups are hungry for these weapons, and would use them without a hint of conscience.”

[Transcript of Remarks by President Bush, 3/11/02]

The terrorist attacks on the United States have focused attention on prevention and protection against future assaults; yet less public attention has been focused on an equally important fact – that many of the state sponsors of terrorism are those very countries whose ballistic missile programs are becoming more sophisticated and lethal: North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Libya.

Those countries which already possess ballistic missiles “continue to increase the range, reliability, and accuracy of the missile systems in their inventories — posing ever greater risks to U.S. forces, interests, and allies throughout the world” [NIE, p. 5]. The NIE specifically highlights the growing sophistication of missile arsenals among countries that are designated as state sponsors of terrorism by the State Department. Among these:

North Korea

The determination of a state like North Korea to develop long-range ballistic missiles is apparent when one observes how it is spending its scarce resources on this effort, even at a time when its economy is in serious trouble.

As the NIE points out, North Korea’s potential ballistic missile threat to the United States, and its ongoing threat to our deployed forces and our allies, is a product of two missiles, the Taepo Dong-2 and the No Dong:

- “The Taepo Dong-2 in a two-stage configuration could deliver a several-hundred-kg payload up to 10,000 km — sufficient to strike Alaska, Hawaii, and parts of the continental United States. If the North uses a third stage similar to the one used on the Taepo Dong 1 in 1998 in a ballistic missile configuration, then the Taepo Dong-2 could deliver a several-hundred-kg payload up to 15,000 km — sufficient to strike all of North America” [p.11].

This new assessment represents a significant increase in the range attributed to the Taepo Dong-2 ballistic missile. Previous estimates put the range of a two-stage Taepo Dong-2 at 4,000-6,000 km, enabling it to deliver a nuclear weapon to Alaska and Hawaii but not to the rest of the United States. The new assessment of 10,000 km means that a Taepo Dong-2 is capable of striking – in addition to Alaska and Hawaii – U.S. territory north and west of an arc from Phoenix, Arizona to Madison, Wisconsin. The Intelligence Community assesses the Taepo Dong-2 may be ready for flight-testing. This change shows how the missile threat can evolve in just two years, when compared to the 1999 NIE.

North Korea has willingly assumed the “role as the missile and manufacturing technology source for many programs” and seller of “complete systems and components,” which has allowed other states “to acquire longer-range capabilities earlier than otherwise would have been possible — notably the sale of the No Dong MRBM (Medium Range Ballistic Missile) to Pakistan,” notes the NIE [p. 7].

Iran

Iran has now joined North Korea in the Intelligence Community’s opinion as a nation that “most likely” will threaten the United States with an ICBM before 2015. This represents a change in language from the 1999 NIE which stated that the United States would most likely face ICBM threats from “North Korea, **probably** Iran, and possibly from Iraq.” According to the NIE:

- “All agencies agree that Iran could attempt to launch an ICBM/SLV (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile/Space Launch Vehicle) about mid-decade, although most agencies believe Iran is likely to take until the last half of the decade to do so.”
- “If Iran were to acquire complete TD-2 (Taepo Dong-2) systems from North Korea, it could conduct a flight test within a year of delivery, allowing time to construct a launch facility. Iran is unlikely to acquire complete ICBM/SLV systems from Russia.”
- “Iran’s missile inventory is among the largest in the Middle East and includes some 1,300-km-range Shahab-3 MRBMs, a few hundred SRBMs (Short Range Ballistic Missiles), and a variety of unguided rockets. Tehran’s longstanding commitment to its ballistic missile programs — for deterrence and war-fighting — is unlikely to diminish” [p. 12].

While press reports on the NIE have focused on the fact that one agency disagrees about the threat from Iran, in reality, what the NIE states is that this one agency “judges that Iran is unlikely to achieve a successful test of an ICBM before 2015.” There is no dispute that Iran is seeking to develop long-range ballistic missiles and that it could build a missile by about mid-decade. All countries, including the United States, experience developmental problems with new missile systems, but determining when a failure is going to occur is an extremely inexact science. And mid-decade is only three years away.

Finally, the NIE reports that Iran is “expanding its efforts to sell missile technology,” creating an additional proliferation source in addition to Russia, China, and North Korea.

As for nuclear weapons, the Intelligence Community judges that Iran does not yet have such a weapon, but most agencies assess that Tehran could have one by the end of the decade, with one agency believing it will take longer. However, “all agree that Iran could reduce this time frame by several years with foreign assistance” [p. 12]. According to the report, Iran already has biological and chemical weapons, despite its participation in both the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Iraq

Iraq’s ballistic missile program is driven by its desire to become the predominant regional power and by its hostile relations with many of its neighbors. According to the NIE:

- “Iraq has been able to maintain the infrastructure and expertise necessary to develop missiles, and the IC believes it has retained a small, covert force of Scud-type missiles, launchers, and Scud-specific production equipment and support apparatus. For the next several years at least, Iraq’s ballistic missile initiatives probably will focus on reconstituting its pre-Gulf war capabilities to threatened regional targets and probably will not advance beyond MRBM systems” [p. 13].
- “Once its regional security concerns are being addressed, Iraq may pursue a first-generation ICBM/SLV” [p. 13].

Libya

While the imposition of U.N. sanctions has impeded its efforts to obtain foreign assistance for its longer-range missile programs, Libya is still exceedingly interested in achieving such a capability. According to the NIE:

- “Even if Libya were to obtain a No Dong-class MRBM, Tripoli would be likely to continue to try for longer-range systems to increase the number of U.S. and NATO targets it can hold at risk” [p. 14].

- And while it lacks the infrastructure to build a ballistic missile on its own that by 2015 could target U.S. territory, “Libya’s paths to obtaining an ICBM . . . probably would be to purchase a complete missile system or to set up a foreign assistance arrangement where foreign scientists and technicians design, develop, and produce a missile and the necessary infrastructure in Libya” [p. 15].

As for weapons of mass destruction, Libya already has a biological and chemical weapons program. And while the report states that “Libya would need significant foreign assistance to acquire a nuclear weapon,” it also warns that “Tripoli’s nuclear infrastructure enhancements remain of concern” [p. 15].

Proliferation Concerns

Some may argue that the threat to U.S. security from rogue countries’ ballistic missiles are contingent upon their ability to secure foreign assistance. As the report clearly states, however, there are several countries willing and able to fill that gap:

“Proliferation of ballistic missile-related technologies, materials, and expertise — especially by Russian, Chinese, and North Korean entities — has enabled emerging missile states to accelerate the development timelines for their existing programs, acquire turnkey systems to gain previously non-existent capabilities and lay the groundwork for the expansion of domestic infrastructures to potentially accommodate even more capable and longer-range future systems” [p. 7].

The Element of Surprise

Some may observe that the NIE appears to relegate the ballistic missile threat to the U.S. homeland as a concern for 15 years down the road. Yet even the Intelligence Community has been surprised by unexpected developments regarding weapons of mass destruction.

These surprises were noted in the Rumsfeld Commission’s report of July 1998. The Commission was an independent, bipartisan commission tasked to assess the nature and magnitude of existing and emerging ballistic missile threats to the United States. The Commission’s report concluded that the missile threat to the United States “is broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly than has been reported in estimates and reports by the intelligence community,” and that a rogue nation could acquire the capability to strike the United States with a ballistic missile within about five years of a decision to acquire such a capability. Importantly, the Commission noted that “during several of those years, the United States might not be aware that such a decision had been made” [Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States (commonly referred to as the Rumsfeld Report), p. 3].

The Commission also warned that such threats may not be identified or identifiable, creating little or no warning before a rogue country's missiles become operational. It's unclear whether the nature of the threat would be perceived clearly enough to allow time to take appropriate action:

“The warning times the U.S. can expect of new, threatening ballistic missile deployments are being reduced. Under some plausible scenarios — including re-basing or transfer of operational missiles, sea- and air-launch options, shortened development programs that might include testing in a third country, or some combination of these — the U.S. might well have little or no warning before operational deployment” [The Rumsfeld Report, p.3].

Defending Against All Threats

Importantly, the NIE highlights how “the events of September 11 and its aftermath have caused the Intelligence Community to focus significantly more resources on the threat from terrorism,” noting that they are “obtaining more information on potential terrorist actions” [p. 18]. Nobody would argue with the need for this. In fact, President Bush recently unveiled his FY 2003 homeland defense budget, which nearly doubles the nation's spending on homeland security to \$37.7 billion, and marks President Bush's commitment to a long-term campaign against terrorism.

But a thorough reading of the NIE points out, buttressed by the Rumsfeld Commission's conclusions, that the growing ballistic missile threat cannot be dismissed. Notably, those very countries that sponsor terrorism are also the countries that are trying to achieve a long-range ballistic missile capability that could target America. Already, some of these countries can put our overseas forces and allies at risk, impeding potential U.S. action in crises.

This Administration, properly, has set out to defend against the wide range of threats that have been presented by the war on terrorism. And so, while the budget provides close to \$40 billion for homeland defense, the FY03 funding request also provides funding for missile defense programs in the amount of \$7.8 billion. Both efforts are essential for protecting the United States from current and future threats.

As Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated in October of last year:

“Last month, terrorists took civilian airliners and turned them into missiles, killing thousands. If they had ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction capable of killing hundreds of thousands, I don't think anyone can doubt that they would have willingly used them” [*Pentagon briefing*, 10/25/01].

Written By: Dr. Yvonne Bartoli, 224-2946

